THE BENEFIT.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK.

An Engineer's Strange Story of a Little Moth.

Traveling recently from Chicago to New York, I found in the morning upon crawling out of my berth that the train was standing stock still. The porter told me that it had been standing thus for an hour and a half, while I had been sleeping the sleep of the just.

"Freight train done wopsed up on de track ahead," said the porter. "I reckon we don' get out o' here under anudder hour or two."

I dressed and peeped out and saw we were alongside the platform of a country station. I took a good breakfast in the dining car and then went out to stroll up and down the platform.

Presently I went to the locomotive and stopped to admire it. There is nothing much better to look at, for that matter, than the locomotive of one of these through express trains on the great trunk lines. How it throbs as it stands, straining with pent-up power, as if impatient to leap away at fearful speed!

This one was hissing fiercely, while the measured thud of the air pump sounded as if it might be the regular breathing of a sleeping giant.

In the cab sat the engineer alone, waiting. I stopped and gossiped with him a moment about the engine. Then I offered him a cigar, which he took, with thanks, and asked me to come in. I swung myself into his cab.

The engineer—a bright, pleasant-faced man, about forty years old—explained to me the uses of the numerous valves and levers about him. They were all as bright and shining as polish could make them, for the engineer is as proud of his engine as any housewife is of the neatness of her dwelling. I glanced at the two shining steam-gauges with the clock between them, and then I noticed what seemed to be an ordinary white moth, mounted in a gilt frame, hanging against the wall of the cab.

"Is that for ornament?" I asked, pointing at the moth.

The engineer smiled. "Well, partly for ornament," he said, "but a good deal more for sentiment. I put that moth there because it saved my life and the lives of two hundred and fifty people as well."

"How in the world could an insect save human lives?" I asked.

"Well, I'll tell you, if you want to hear the story. I reckon there's time enough before we're able to get out of this."

I settled myself in the absent fireman's seat, and prepared to listen.

"It wasn't such a long time ago," said the engineer; "only a year ago last spring. I was running this very train, and had this very engine—old 449. My fireman was Jim Meade—same fellow I've got now. You can see him over there, leaning up against the telegraph office.

"Jim is a good boy, but he is very superstitious; believes in ghosts, dreams and warnings. I used to laugh at his fancies, but I don't make as much fun of him as I did—not since we saw the woman in black.

"We were scheduled to leave M—— about one o'clock in the morning, and [illegible] o'clock. On the night when this thing took place a fearful storm of wind and rain had been raging since early evening, and was at the height of its fury when I started for the round-house.

"It was about midnight, and the wind seemed to sweep clear around and through the building. It was terribly dismal. Jim was there, and the engine was all ready, so, after getting my working clothes on, I ran the machine down to the station. Our train, the vestibule limited, was an hour late. I gave the engine a thorough oiling, and made sure that all was in order.

"As we sat in the cab we could hear the storm raging outside, while the rain, driven by the gusts of wind, beat fiercely against the windows.

"'It's going to be a bad run, Frank,' Jim said. 'I wish we were in S——, safe and sound.'

"I laughed. 'What makes you so terribly glum, Jim?' I asked.

"'Oh,' said he, 'I just feel creepy somehow. Seems like there's something terrible going to happen. I can feel it in my bones.'

"I laughed again. 'You got a little wet coming over, I guess, Jim,' said I. 'And the sound of the wind isn't very encouraging, that's a fact.'

"To tell the truth I was a little nervous myself, notwithstanding my easy way of treating Jim's notions.

"Presently our train came in, long and heavy, consisting mainly of sleepers. It used to make me nervous to know that the lives of hundreds of my fellow-men were in my keeping, but now I think nothing of it. That night I was nervous. What if the frightful storm had made a switchman careless, or if a rail had been loosened by the settling of the track somewhere? On these fast trains a man must rely on the vigilance of the employes; for, in order to make schedule time, he must run at such a speed that often he cannot see a signal before he is upon it.

"But I laughed at myself for my fears as I backed down and coupled on to the train. I set the brakes and found everything in good order.

"By and by the little gong above my head clanged sharply, and with a puff and hiss of escaping steam we were off into the night and storm, rattling over switches, past signal lights and between long lines of cars, till, with a roar and rumble, we rushed over the long iron bridge and away through the hills, waking their slumbering echoes with our shrill whistle.

"Then I pulled the throttle wide open, and the clank and roar soon settled into a hum, for old 449 was doing her best, and we were making fifty miles an hour.

"The darkness was intense save where the headlight, an electrical device, cast its funnel of light into the gloom. Jim had a hot fire, and kept steam up to a high pressure, so that we fairly flew on past sleeping hamlets and still farmhouses.

"At our first watering station I made sure that all was working smoothly, while Jim inspected the headlight. The operator handed out the orders, which showed that the road was clear as far as our next stopping place. On we went.

"The darkness grew more intense, if possible, while the wind shrieked by. The rain became more blinding, till nothing could be distinguished in the [illegible] which surrounded us.

"Suddenly, through the mist and rain, I saw, looming right before us, the gigantic figure of a woman wrapped in a long, black mantle, which seemed to flutter in the wind. She waved great spectral arms about in swift, twisting movements. As I sat, looking in horror, the figure vanished with a final wave of her arms.

"I was too much astonished and stupefied to make a move of my hand toward the throttle. At that moment Jim had been bending over the fire. As he looked up he exclaimed:

"'Hullo, Frank, what's up? You look as if you had seen a ghost!'

"I did not answer. My mind was too full of that strange figure I had seen.

"We were now nearing Rock creek, where there is a trestle over a deep stream. I felt more nervous than ever.

"We dashed around the curve and whizzed by Rock Creek station, which is only a mile from the trestle. As we passed I glanced at the steamgauge for an instant.

"A cry from Jim caused me to turn quicly toward him. He sat rigid, his eyes large and staring, his jaw dropped, the very picture of terror.

"He pointed with a shaking finger out into the darkness. I turned and looked, and then began to shake myself.

"There, on the track, was that same hideous figure of a woman, outlined on the background of light from the engine, now motionless, now whirling in a witch dance, but all the time motioning us back.

"'Frank,' gasped Jim, but scarcely above a whisper, 'don't go over that trestle! Don't go, for heaven's sake! Don't go till you're sure it's safe!'

"I suppose I was pretty badly scared. At any rate, I put on the air-brake for all I was worth. I couldn't have resisted the impulse to stop the train.

"As we came to a stop, I could hear the roar of the water in Rock creek right ahead. I stepped out of the cab, and met the conductor coming up.

"'What's the matter? What's the matter?' he asked, impatiently.

"I felt decidedly foolish. There was no gigantic woman to be seen now. Nothing could be made out more than a few feet away in the blinding storm.

"'Well,' said I, 'we've seen something. I don't know what it is—seemed like it was a great black ghost—that was waving its arms and warning us not to go forward.'

"The conductor looked at me curiously. 'Are you crazy, Frank?' he said. 'I should think you were. But we're so near the trestle we'll take a look at it.'

"We took our lanterns and went ahead, leaving Jim with the engine. He looked scared all over. But I tell you we had not gone five rods before we stopped in horror.

"There at our feet lay a black chasm, filled with the roar of the river, as swollen with the spring rains it dashed down toward the lake. The bridge was washed away!

"Only a few splinters of wood and twisted iron clung to the abutment, while now, far out over the blackness, that awful black figure of a woman danced again on the thin air, relieved against the shaft of light that the head-[illegible]

"It was flinging its arms about as if in wild glee.

"The conductor stared at the chasm and then at me.

"'Was that the thing you saw when you stopped the train?' he asked.

"'Yes.'

"'Well, it's something more than luck that saved us to-night, Frank.'

"We went back slowly to the train, feeling very queer, and thankful, too, I can assure you. Several of the passengers had come running forward by this time. Among them was a young fellow from Chicago, about eighteen years old, who was smarter than the whole of us, as it turned out.

"When this boy saw the woman in black, he turned and looked at the locomotive headlight. Then he ran up toward it. I looked at it as he did so. I saw a peculiar spot on the glass.

"'There's your woman in black!' said the Chicago boy.

"And there it was, sure enough—that same moth miller that you see there in that frame. He was clinging to the inside of the glass. As I tapped on the glass, the creature flew back and lighted on the reflector.

"That's the whole story, sir. The moth, by fluttering on the glass just in front of the electric illuminator, had produced a great black shadow, like that of a cloaked woman, on the darkness in front of us; and when he flopped his wings in his vain attempt to sail out through the glass, he gave his mysterious shadow the look of waving its arms wildly.

"Then when he flew back out of the direct shine of the light, the figure disappeared, of course.

"We never knew just how he got in there, but no doubt it happened when Jim went to fix the light at the pumping-station.

"Anyhow, he saved our lives by scaring us with that woman in black.

"So you see why I keep the moth in the frame. It's to remind me of the way we were saved that night. Yes, you might call it accidental, but I call it providential."

"All aboard," called the conductor of the limited, coming out of the telegraph office with a paper in his hand.

Jim, the fireman, ran and jumped into the cab as I stepped down to go back to my car.—Frederic P. Potter, in Youth's Companion.

As to Flies.

The small boy was looking over his picture book and his father was deeply absorbed in his newspaper.

"Pop," inquired his youngster, "what is a tobacco fly?"

"It's a kind of a fly that lays its eggs on tobacco plants and produces the destructive tobacco worm," replied the father without looking up from his paper.

The boy turned over another leaf or two.

"Pop," he asked again, "what is a butterfly?"

The father was more intent on his paper than before.

"It's a fly that lays its eggs on butter and—confound it, what do you ask so many questions for? Anybody ought to know what a butterfly is," and the boy grinned.—Detroit Free Press.

—It may be that they always speak of a man as following the races because he never gets ahead of them.—Buffalo Express.